

United Way of Cass County

Community Conversations 2019



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United Way of Cass County

The Process

The Process United Way of Cass County commissioned Project Matters, LLC to engage in a series of community conversations with the residents of Cass County in order to ascertain the aspirations, concerns and actions the citizens feel are important to the future well-being and growth of Cass County and who they trust to act on those items. These conversations took shape from the *Harwood Public Innovation* and *Turning Outward Model* of involving community stakeholders and making this a community knowledge project to be shared.

The Goal for this Report is to share the top aspirations that arose during those community conversations, the concerns or barriers connected with achieving those, where United Way should focus its efforts and actions and who the community trusts to carry out those processes. ***It is important to note all comments within the participant aspiration pages are in their words and any needed clarity of context was provided within parenthetical reference.***

Why is all of this Important? United Way of Cass County has as its mission to increase the ability of the people of Cass County to care for one another, to promote human services and to maximize resources. Its vision is to advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. The information gathered from the conversations will allow United Way to be intentional and focused on its strategies to invest for the future goals of Cass County. It is also hoped this report will become an important tool for use by community partners and residents to become engaged in community growth and humanitarian efforts.

It is our Sincere Hope that all residents and leaders of Cass County consider this their go-to tool in becoming engaged with intentional positive actions and the development of resources to achieve the collective goals for the good of this community.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION?

Community Conversations serve two important purposes:

- Turning – Outward: Is a way to authentically engage members of the community.
- They generate Public Knowledge that can then be used to inform decision-making of all kinds.

Engage the community to understand:

- People’s aspirations for the community.
- People’s concerns.
- How people think and talk about a given issue in relation to the community.
- The changes needed to reach our aspirations for the community.
- What people believe we can do and who they would trust to take action.

Community Conversation themes help inform how we:

- Engage the community: Inviting new people opens the door to new relationships.
- Find new partners: Sharing Public Knowledge creates coalition opportunities.
- Develop strategies: Working on the issue AND building capacity to work together.
- Mobilize resources: Creating natural pathways for people to contribute.

We Listened

25 CONVERSATIONS
212 PARTICIPANTS

THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS LISTED BELOW were comprised of a representative composite of individuals from each demographic group.

- Area Five Agency on Aging and Community Services - Mom’s Group
- Cass County Elected Officials
- Cass County Ministerial Association
- Cass County Resource Network
- Cass Pulaski Community Corrections Residents
- City of Logansport Elected Officials and Department Heads
- Educators
- Galveston Community
- Healthcare Professionals
- High School Students
- Ivy Tech Students
- Karen People of Myanmar (Burma)
- Latinos/Immigrants
- Law Enforcement
- Logansport 1 Open Invitation
- Logansport 2 Open Invitation
- Logansport Cass County Chamber of Commerce - Major Employers
- Onward Community
- Royal Center Community
- Senior Citizens
- Twelve Mile Community
- United Way Agencies
- United Way Board of Directors
- Walton Community
- Young America Community

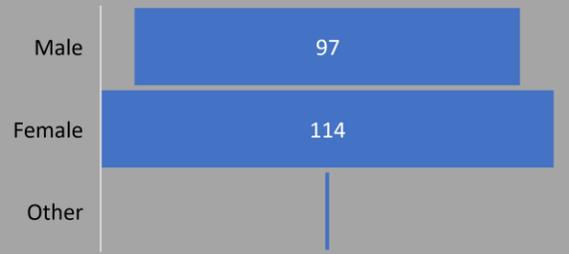
Conversation Demographics

ETHNICITY

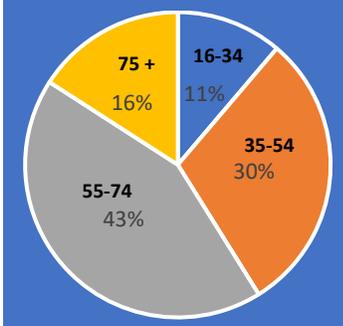
- 6.7% Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander
- .5% Black, African American, African Descent
- 1% American Indian, Aleut, Native American, Alaskan Native
- 84% White, Caucasian, European Descent
- 8% Other



GENDER



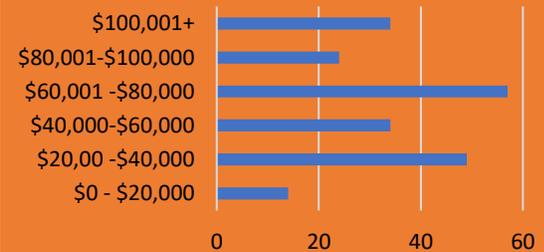
PARTICIPANT AGE RANGE



LANGUAGE

- 10.4% Spanish
- 83.0% English
- 6.6% Other (Karen, French, Thai)

INCOME



ASPIRATIONS

From these conversations, the following are the LEADING ASPIRATIONS which emerged for CASS COUNTY.



1 ASPIRATION

WE WANT A SAFE & DRUG-FREE COMMUNITY

While people want a SAFE AND DRUG-FREE community, they are CONCERNED that:

- Drug abuse is in the way of achieving a safe community

As people talk about that CONCERN, they talk more specifically about:

- Perception vs. reality of safety (some say they don't feel safe, but data shows Cass Co. is a safe community)
- Drugs are getting worse and are more accepted than they used to be
- Suicides are increasing
- There is distrust of law enforcement and the system (lawyers, judges, politicians)
- Drug offenders are labeled as criminals, so they don't (get a chance to) make an impact by telling their stories

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Drug treatment programs
- Education programs like D.A.R.E.
- Recovery homes
- Outreach programs
- Needle exchanges
- Not looking the other way and denying there is a problem

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those actions:

- Pastors
- Churches
- Police
- Mental health providers
- United Way of Cass County
- Cass County Community Foundation

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"There's not a family who hasn't been affected by the opioid crisis. There's a lack of proactive programs."

"I don't think there is much we can do. We are labeled criminals, so I don't think anyone in this room can make a difference. I don't think we have an impact by telling our stories." - Recovering Addict

"I think we trust people in the system more than the system."

"We ARE a safe community, but the perception is unsafe."

"If things are in good repair, people feel safer."

2 ASPIRATION

WE WANT AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

While people want an INCLUSIVE community, they are CONCERNED that:

- (There are) language barriers
- Growing up with bias and lack of exposure to, and acceptance of diversity, gets in the way of achieving this aspiration

As people talk about that CONCERN, they talk more specifically about:

- Discrimination
- Fear
- Miscommunication
- Safety
- Not being understood
- Tribalism
- Lack of respect for those who do not speak English

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Changing mindsets
- Educating and learning about each other
- Communicating for understanding
- Having more inclusive events
- Holding citizenship workshops and diversity training
- Having conversations across lines with city, police and immigrants

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those actions:

- Organizations that use data to make decisions
- Churches
- Schools
- Outside experts
- Zach Szmara

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"We have a perception of the need without getting into the culture to find out the true need."

"The issues you focus on are the issues that you see every day or live in. It's hard to see others' perspectives sometimes and appreciate their concerns."

"There are generations of people saying racist comments and not knowing how it hurts."

"Stand by us." (Latinos to Whites)

"We are immigrating here. We have to change - not the community. Other side make one small effort."

"I feel very happy and hopeful today." (Karen Person of Myanmar)

3 ASPIRATION

WE WANT A THRIVING & SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

While people want a THRIVING & SUPPORTIVE community, they are CONCERNED that:

- A lack of functional families is in the way of achieving those aspirations

As people talk about that CONCERN, they talk more specifically about:

- Lack of parenting skills
- Some parents don't participate in their children's lives and activities
- The influence of social media and technology
- Lack of financial strength

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Discipline and accountability
- More personal interaction between family members
- (Putting an) emphasis on education
- Programs that help kids and parents get involved in the community and instill a sense of civic duty

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those actions:

- Pastors
- Churches
- Logansport Memorial Hospital
- Four County Counseling

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"Change starts on an individual level."

"For the community to prosper, we have to get people into the community, and then give them a reason to come back."

"Teach kids that failure is a part of life and learning."

"We need to invest in our youth – give them a sense of civic duty."

"Social organizations are important to a community; socialization on the phone is not the same."

4 ASPIRATION

WE WANT AN ACTIVE, GROWING & PROGRESSIVE COMMUNITY

While people want an ACTIVE, GROWING & PROGRESSIVE community, they are CONCERNED that:

- We're treading water
- We lack community involvement
- We lack activity and inspiration
- We hear the same voices over and over again
- People do not want to think outside the box

As people talk about that CONCERN, they talk more specifically about:

- A lack of engagement at all levels
- Doing the same thing we've done for 50 years
- We're comfortably "stuck"
- We're too fragmented
- Organizations are competing for people's time and are on the edge of dissolving
- It's hard to get involved

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Better communication
- Collaboration toward a shared vision for the community
- More activities and things to do for young people
- More diverse volunteer base
- Asking people to get involved
- Advertising our needs and accomplishments better

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those actions:

- People who have a heart for the community

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"Cass County is re-active; it needs to be proactive."

"We are comfortably stuck; it's time to be uncomfortable."

"We need young professionals back in the community; new ideas and involvement."

"We need more positive stories."

"So many places are trying to solve the problem. We need to pool our resources/ideas together instead of each place doing its own thing. We need to go forward together."

Conversation Insights

In this process of turning outward to listen to the citizens of Cass County, it must be recognized that there is now an inherent responsibility to respect the honesty of their feedback. People expect that they were sincerely heard and action will happen – as reflected in this quote *“I feel happy and hopeful today.”* The community has entrusted the United Way of Cass County with this information. They expect there will be movement in translating their aspirations, concerns and ideas for action into a forward process whereby the Cass County community comes together in a way that will foster goodwill and prosperity for all its citizens.

The conversation process revealed peoples’ concern that there has been no real progress in bringing key partners together to address diversity issues. This report also reveals a strong desire for the strengthening of the community core – its families; as well as the desire for a community that is cleaned up, looks appealing to both residents and visitors, is drug-free and becomes progressive in addressing growth and prosperity for all of its citizens.

This document provides a launching point for bringing people together to begin addressing those concerns. Demonstrating both individual and collective value through respect of one another’s ideas as Cass County makes an initial step toward those economic and community aspirations is a great way to acknowledge this valued input and begin community progress.

Finally, through feedback from participant surveys, it is important to note that 46% of respondents were more likely to get involved in other conversations and activities about important community issues because of this experience. People were happy to have been given an opportunity to share their concerns and aspirations. They are hopeful the United Way will begin leading the way to impactful change. Some of their comments:

“I hope and pray there are more open-minded discussions like this. As an individual from a different country, it’s nice to be heard. I think the discussion is a healthy one. Thanks...”

“Great dialogue. Keep up the conversations and the good work in our community.”

“Many topics are hard to address, so making them easier to bring about would be great.”

“Thank you for including us!”

Project Matters^{LLC} We at Project Matters, LLC were honored to be entrusted with this important endeavor for United Way of Cass County. May you and the community reap many benefits from this process.



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